

## Stories in the making: what artists made of the 2018 RAI art, materiality and representation conference

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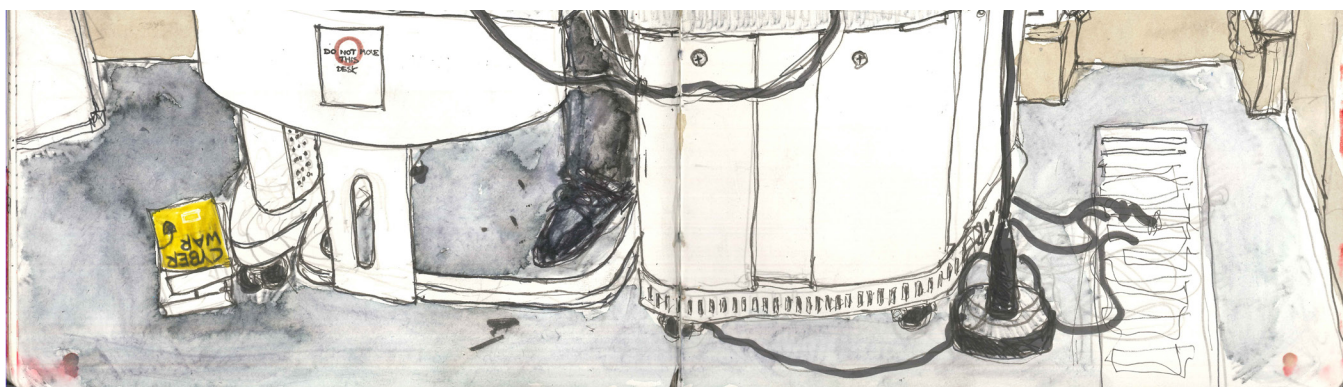
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# STORIES IN THE MAKING

WHAT ARTISTS MADE OF THE  
2018 RAI ART, MATERIALITY AND REPRESENTATION CONFERENCE



ANGELA BREW AND GEMMA AELLAH



Royal Anthropological Institute

# Anthropology & Art

A new open-access publication series edited by the RAI Anthropology of Art Committee. The series stems from the international conference Art, Materiality and Representation organized by the RAI in collaboration with the British Museum and the School of Oriental and African Studies in 2018. Its aims are to make available to a wide audience works that engage with the connections between visual, material, aural and other expressive human practices and the lived worlds in which they take place from an anthropologically informed perspective.

We solicit new contributions from anthropologists and others – such as archaeologists, art historians and practitioners – that will enhance and expand our collective understanding and appreciation of this important area of social life.

## **Guidelines for submission:**

Texts should be of maximum 8,000 words (including endnotes and references). We welcome original works that explore the meaningfulness of images, artefacts, sounds and performances and engage with anthropological approaches and/or analysis. There are no restrictions regarding the emphasis on the visual and textual aspects of the contributions and authors are welcome to discuss their proposed submission with the editor (paolo.fortis@durham.ac.uk).

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Angela Brew and Gemma Aellah

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STORIES IN THE MAKING  
WHAT ARTISTS MADE OF THE  
2018 RAI ART, MATERIALITY AND REPRESENTATION CONFERENCE

ANGELA BREW AND GEMMA AELLAH

WITH CONTRIBUTIONS FROM JO ATHERTON, PHILIP NOBLE,  
HERMIONE SPRIGGS, ABHI DINSMORE-TULI, EMMA FÄLT,  
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Royal Anthropological Institute

***Anthropology & Art No. 1***



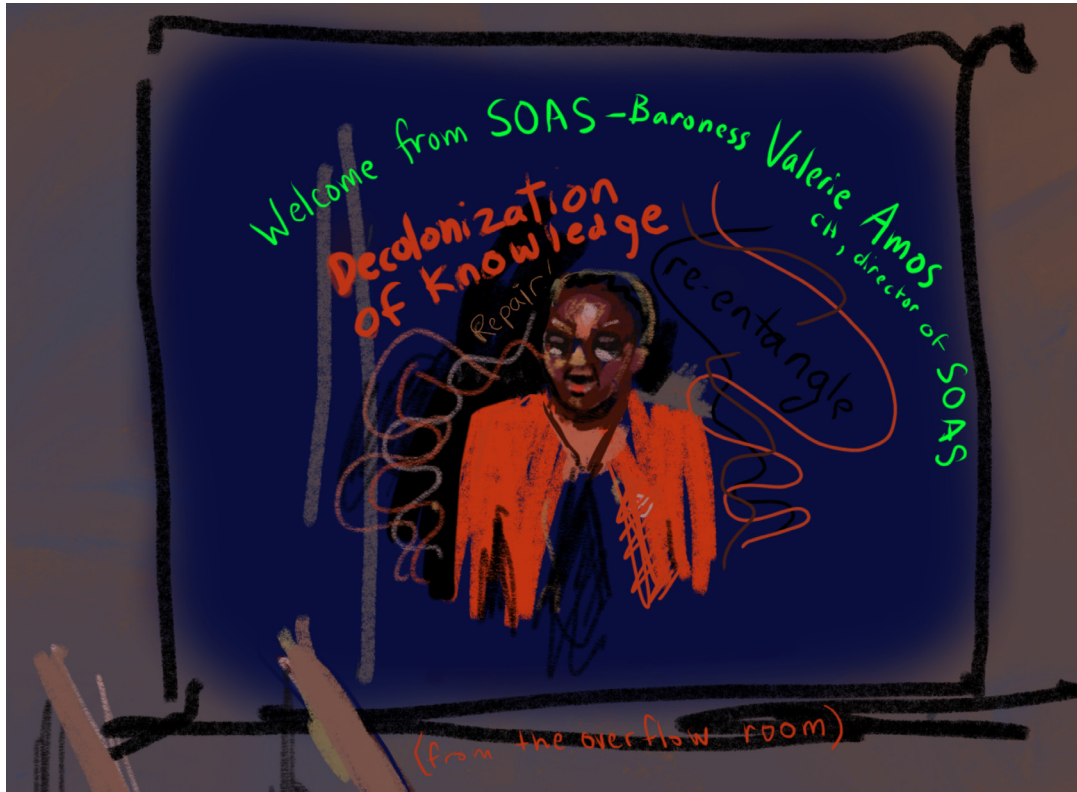
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*'The Welcome'. Drawing of the opening session of the 2018 RAI Biennale Conference on Art, Materiality and Representation by artist-scriber Andrea Kantrowitz.*

## Introduction

There has been a recent surge of innovation and experimentation in response to environmental concerns and COVID-19 within conventional academic conferencing in anthropology. This has involved rethinking possible modes of attendance, such as virtual conferencing or live-tweeting of conference content. At the same time, there has been a proliferation of alternative modes of presentation that attempt to ground anthropological discussions in material or embodied forms such as the inclusion of exhibitions, laboratories and practice-based workshops alongside more conventional panels and plenaries, especially in conferences encouraging interdisciplinary audiences. However, exhibitions and experimental activities

generally function as sideshows to the main event. Mostly, the main model of conference participation, whether in person or in a virtual space, still tends to be a presenter speaking a textual narrative, either read or remembered from a written paper, and often supported by slides with visuals. Attendees listen to these narratives, perhaps while note-taking. They might ask questions at the end. We are, still, more accustomed to engaging with anthropological data, theories and concepts during conference attendance in conventional linear textual forms. In terms of conference participation, therefore, although there is increasingly experimentation around attendance and modes of participation, less regard has perhaps been given to what these experiments do in terms of modes of attention.

By this we mean both the cognitive work different people might do to interpret, record and remember their understandings of conference presentations, as well as the thinking behind, and success of, alternative forms of presentation that aim to capture the attention of audiences through material or embodied representations.

During the Royal Anthropological Institute's biennial conference 'Art, Materiality and Representation' (1–3 June 2018), held across spaces inside the British Museum and the School of Oriental and African Studies, there were several experiments in participation going on across over 100 panels. Here, we describe two of them that specifically involved artists. For many, this was their first time attending an anthropology conference. We share their reflections on the experience, alongside representations of the things they created. We pay attention to their accounts of their experiences of attending to conference content or of capturing the attention of conference attendees through drawing or making.

First, we share some of the outputs of a group of contemporary-artist scribes from Thinking Through Drawing, a research and education network concerned with the role of drawing in embedding and deepening memory, understanding and learning. The artists were invited to act as 'conference-scribers' and to provide an alternative collective documentation of the conference themes and discussions. This contrasted with the previous RAI biennial conference, at which a group of early career researchers had been invited to roam the across the conference and provide textual summaries. Below, we present some of the material produced by the artist-scribers in the moment of attending to the conference, as well as their later textual narratives on the experience.

Five of the artists-scribers used drawing to participate in and engage with conference panels and keynotes. Their work was, in the words of one 'an exercise in embodied thinking'. Some attended to the experience of conference participation itself, producing striking visuals that give a sense of the 'feel' of sitting in a panel. Others drew annotated portraits, linking speakers to ideas and exploring creative interplays between text and image. One artist-scriber dispensed with drawing altogether and documented the conference in poetic stanzas. Hameed's stanzas 'Until it knows all about this being alive' captures a recurring tension that conference speakers grappled with and that the artist-scribers picked up on: the peculiar struggle involved in analytically describing or representing art by talking about it academically.

*Something is being born in an upstairs room  
while we are discussing it down here.  
Fetch it to your breast, why don't you,  
Bounce it on your knee,  
Until it knows all about this being alive?  
Because something is dying In a basement room  
While we are discussing it up here.  
Drag it from the grave, why don't you,  
Pump it full of air,  
Until it knows all about this being alive.*

In his later reflection on these stanzas, produced during the three days of the conference, Hameed wrote that he sensed that 'Anthropologists want a mode of cultural inquiry that doesn't abstract itself from culture, and they seem to have found this in art, which they nevertheless continue, for the most part, to view analytically, "from without".'

At the other end of the spectrum of participation, we present some of the work and reflections of artists involved in the Stories in

the Making exhibition that ran throughout the conference. The thinking behind the exhibition was to provide a space for a group of artists to give material presentations of their work and ideas; to allow for, paraphrasing Hameed, viewing analytically 'from within'. If the artist scribes could be thought of as using art to listen during the conference, then these artists were using art to talk. They developed alternative ways to tell their stories and discuss anthropological concepts with attendees during the conference. These included mixed-media installations designed for one person at a time to engage with, as well as teaching string-figures to groups, and the display of found or made objects that could then be used as starting points for conversations. In the final section of this paper, three of the artist exhibitors discuss their experiences of trying to capture attention in this way.

Overall, what we found most interesting was the hybridity of both types of activities – art as listening and speaking within an anthropology conference – especially the interplay between textual and other forms of representation: visual, material and oral. It was, for all, hard to move away entirely from text. We also found notable differences between representations made to capture the attention of others, which were 'readable', and those that seem like acts of internal cognition: ways of facilitating comprehension in the moment, or of embedding information for later recall, like creating a groove on a record.

### **Scribing the conference**

There are many ways to use scribing, from drawing the visible, to manifestation of invisible ideas and spoken words on paper. The scribes working at the conference used a wide range of styles and approaches while attending presentations, as perceptual and cognitive tools for embedding sensory and conceptual

information. The various approaches include visual observation, poetic scribing, visual and textual note-taking, the drawing of ideas and concepts, annotated digital portraits and abstract gestural mark making.

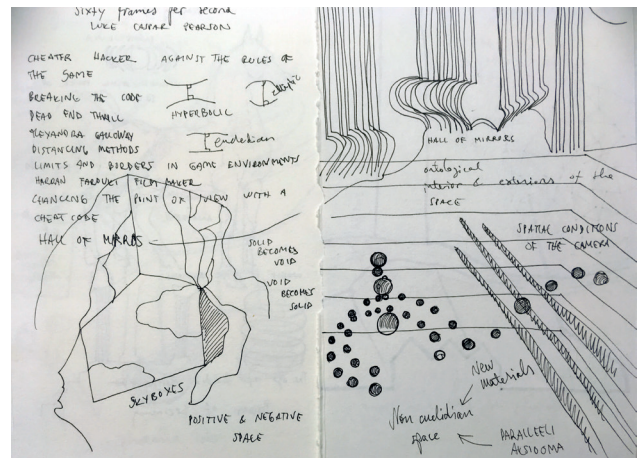
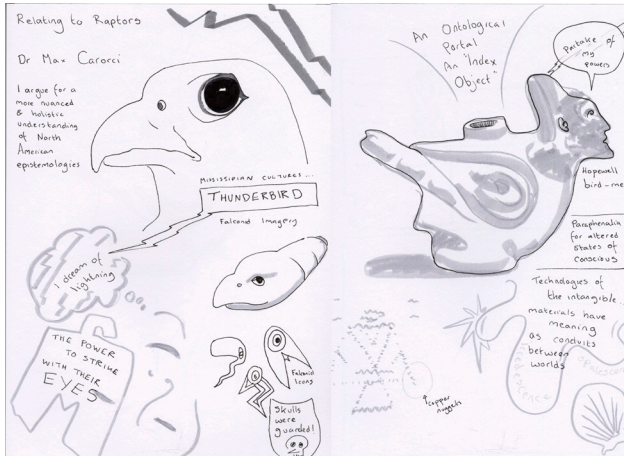
The scribes' methods span two spectra, from the representation of the visually observable to representation of concepts, and from using no written words to large amounts of annotation and text. There is a split in the first spectrum, between observational representation of the people in the room, and the representation of the form and content of talk. For example, while Dinsmore-Tuli draws the room and people in it, Fava draws the content of the talk, attending to both visual and verbal aspects. Kantrowitz mixes these two methods, drawing portraits of speakers surrounded by notes on their words and ideas. Fält uses drawing as a perceptual tool, to 'listen' both to the content and form of a presentation and the physical environment it takes place in. Brew combines these various modes of perception and representation, with a dense mix of observational sketches, conceptual drawings of ideas, abstract responsive marks and textual annotation, in both analogue and digital drawings. On the second spectrum, Dinsmore-Tuli's observational work contain only occasional text, while Fava's conceptual drawings contain a lot. 'About the room' observational (perceptual) drawings tend to have less text added than 'about the presentation' (conceptual) drawings, with Brew and Kantrowitz combining both approaches using a mix of images and text. Notably, Brew and Kantrowitz were the only two scribes to use digital tablets to draw.



## Examples of the six scribes' work showing the range of approaches



*Here in our nest, we are safe.  
Our knowledge is wrapping  
torn from a disposable gift  
stolen by mice on winter nights.  
Lapis Lazuli, Klein Blue, Vantablack;  
mice don't need a patent to stay warm*



*From left to right, top to bottom: work by Dinsmore-Tuli, Hameed, Fava, Kantrowitz, Brew and Fält.*

## Why scribe?

While artists and art teachers have long defended the value of the practice of drawing for visual thinking, it is only recently that the scientific community has taken an interest in its links with cognition. Evidence that demonstrates and explains how drawing can enhance and facilitate cognition is emerging across many disciplines, strengthening the arguments that it can facilitate thought and help in solving problems. Notably, interdisciplinary collaborations between artists and experts in other domains, such as medicine, have contributed to research evidence for drawing as a medium for thinking and research.

Here we present some recent empirical evidence for drawing as a tool for tuning perception and for understanding. At its heart is the fact that when one draws, the body moves – hence drawing is a form of active learning, an embodied perceptual and cognitive process.

Cognitive scientist David Kirsh's research (1995, 2009, 2010, 2011) on the role of our moving bodies in thought and learning, with longitudinal studies of dancers and drawers, shows how movement helps learning and problem solving. Moreover, when we draw, we think not just with our bodies, but also with the pencil and paper. These manifest thought processes and extend the mind: externalizing ideas, increasing working memory, crystalizing emerging ideas, and enabling discovery, as drawers respond, elaborate and revise evolving marks on the drawing surface, allowing invention to be born from ambiguity. Even gesturing in the air without pencil or paper has been shown to enhance cognitive functioning, but ideas and gestures spread about a page can be seen all at once, by many eyes, and across language boundaries. Situated and embodied cognitive paradigms unlock new understandings of the potential of drawing as a powerful tool for thought and discovery.

Another leading cognitive scientist doing researching drawing, Barbara Tversky (2002; Suwa and Tversky 1997; Tversky and Suwa 2009), talks of 'constructive perception', in which we use the external world to anchor and support creative thinking, extending the capacity of our minds through tangible interactions. Drawing can be used actively to explain and interrogate concepts as well as visual information. Bobek and Tversky (2014) compared the effectiveness of drawing a diagram, versus writing a paragraph, when learning about how a bike pump works, or the difference between ionic and covalent bonds. The visual- explanation group performed better than the verbal-explanation group in a later memory test. Even with little 'skill' or experience in drawing, it can enhance performance in cognitive activities such as problem-solving, ideation, invention, memorization, wayfinding, arithmetic, analysis, decision-making, and skill acquisition.

Judy Fan (2015) reviewed the literature for evidence that drawing enhances scientific learning. She explains that when students generate something as part of their learning, rather than passively looking and/or listening, what is known as the 'generation effect' contributes towards learning.

Researchers such as Karpicke and Roediger (2008) found that:

*...subsequent memory is enhanced for information that is self-generated versus externally delivered. In each of these cases, it has been generally observed that self- directed learners enjoy a learning advantage relative to matched 'passive' learners who experience the same sequence of events, but who do not exert volitional control over the flow of information. In actuality, both the 'active' and 'constructive' aspects of drawing may play important and independent roles.*

*(Fan 2015:173–4)*



These embodied modes of perceptual, motor and cognitive engagement are important for research and discovery, as well as for artistic creation. Fan concludes, 'Ultimately, equipping students to think by creating visualizations may lead them to discover by their own hand not only truths about the present world they inhabit but also visions for a better world they could yet build.' (Fan 2015:178).

### **Art makes visible: scribes' responses to Tim Ingold's keynote**

All the artist-scribes' attended Professor Tim Ingold's much anticipated keynote lecture 'Art and Anthropology for a Sustainable World'. This talk, with its themes of unravelling, unfinished and the role of imagination in both art and research resonated deeply with them. We present their works and reflections here as a collective documentation of the events.

#### **Andrea Kantrowitz**

I had read and admired Ingold's work and was very much looking forward to hearing him speak. I was somewhat distanced, initially, by his outward appearance: a classic introverted and rumpled professor type, looking down as he read from his paper, rather than out at the audience. Yet the dynamism of his ideas spoke to me directly and urgently, 'unwrapping' his outward appearance as the theme of his talk, 'Art makes Visible', resonated with my attempts to make his speech visible.

Ingold asked us to we consider how to live for those who will come after. Unravelling... endings that become beginnings, and blockages that become openings. Intertwined threads, radiating outward or folding in on themselves, were my shorthand for the kinds of correspondences and conversations Ingold urged us to have with life. I particularly appreciated his appreciation for the

#### *'Art and Anthropology for a Sustainable World'*

Keynote abstract, Professor Tim Ingold, RAI Art, Materiality and Representation Conference, 2018.

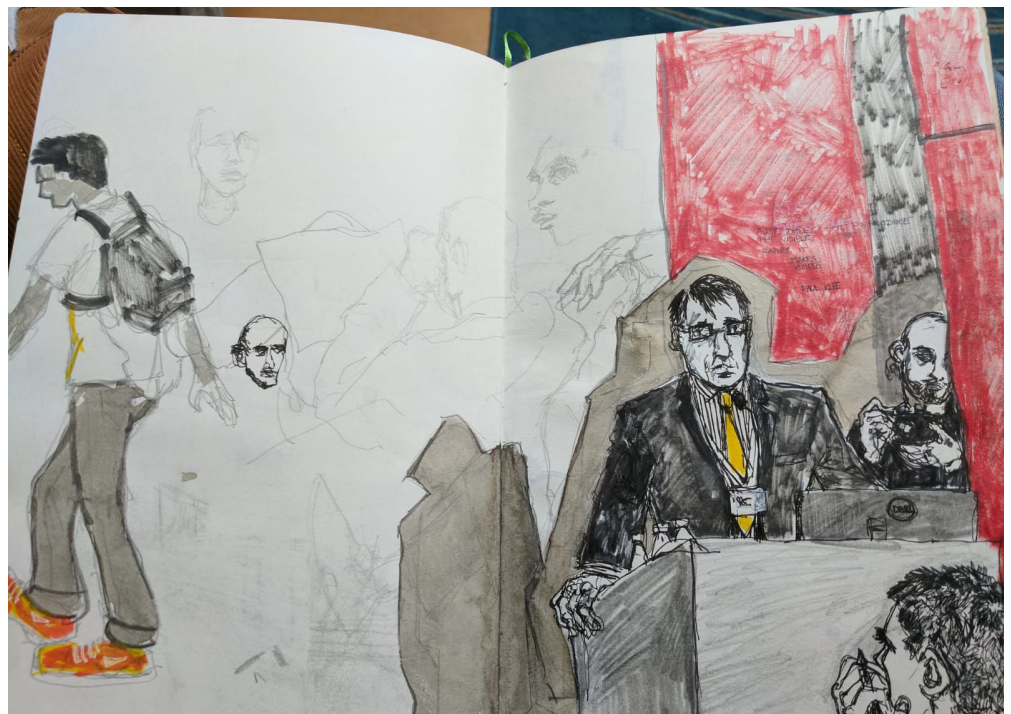
Traditionally, the disciplines of anthropology and art have faced in opposite directions: the former dedicated to understanding forms of life as we find them; the latter to the creation of forms never before encountered. This talk is founded on the premise that the traditional opposition is untenable. Not only would the work of art carry no force unless grounded in a profound understanding of the lived world; but anthropological accounts of the manifold ways along which life is lived would also be of no avail unless brought to bear on speculative inquiries into what the possibilities for human life might be. Thus art and anthropology have in common that they observe, describe and create. Their orientations are as much towards human futures as towards human pasts: these are futures, however, that are not conjured from thin air but forged in the crucible of contemporary social lives. Their aim is to join with these lives in the common task of fashioning a sustainable world – one that is fit for coming generations to inhabit. By sustainability is not meant the maintenance of human environmental relations in a steady state, but rather the possibility for life to carry on. In such a world, the fashioning of things must also be their unfinished, so as to allow every generation to begin afresh. With examples drawn from studies of landscape, craft, building and the performing arts, the implications of this view for the principles and practice of artistic and anthropological research will be discussed.

open-ended qualities of artistic methodologies and the role of the imagination in research. He affirmed that artists have their own ways of doing and knowing that are distinct from the 'final solutions' proposed by 'big science' and no less valuable. For me, this was one false note in his presentation, as the scientific method is characterized by falsifiability, as new evidence continually calls into question old theories. It seemed that Ingold was referring to cultural notions of science, rather than the research practices of actual scientists, which can rely on the imagination no less than artistic practice.



Drawing by Andrea Kantrowitz made during Tim Ingold's keynote.

### Abhi Dinsmore-Tuli



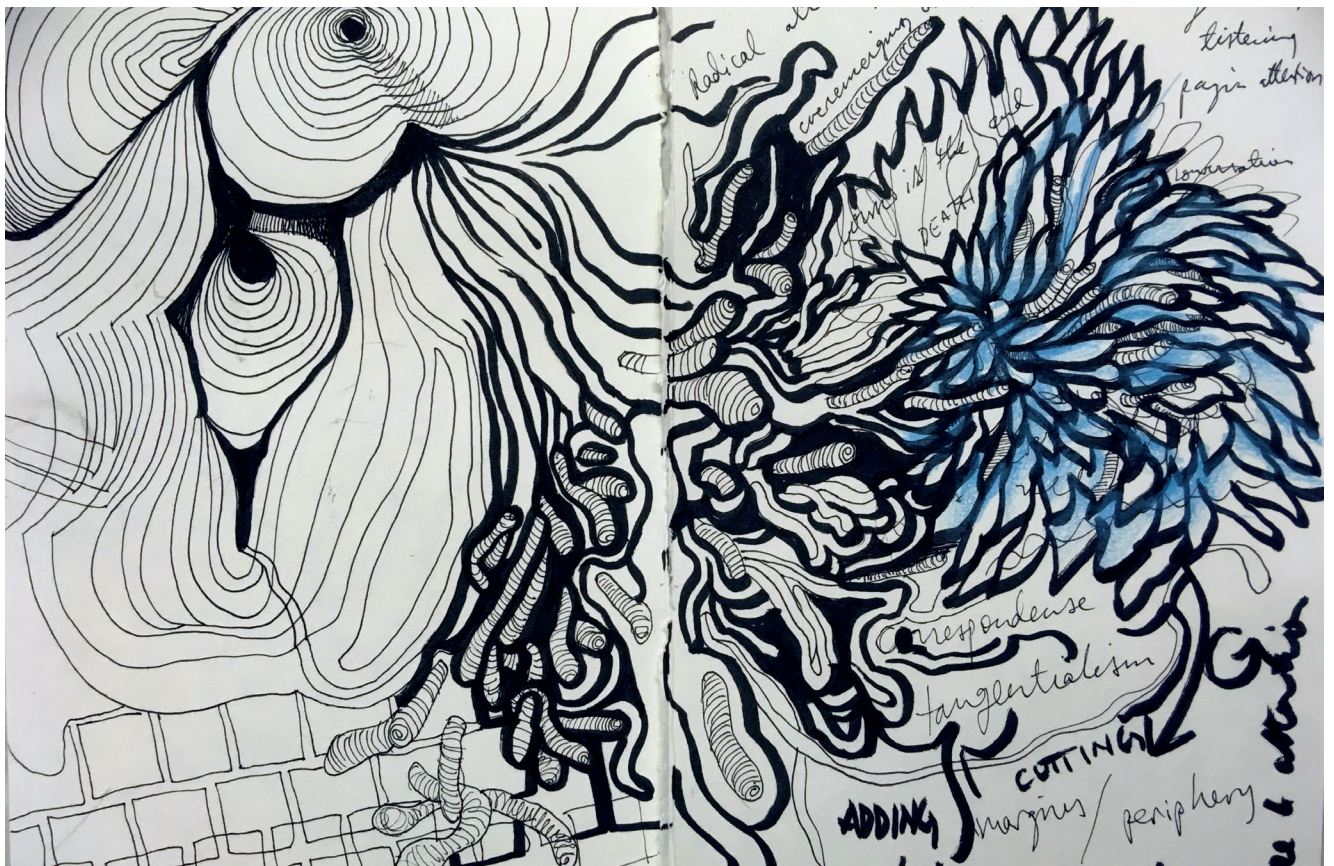
Drawing by Abhi Dinsmore-Tuli made during Tim Ingold's keynote.



Emma Fält



Two drawings by Emma Fält, 'Waiting for Ingold' (right) and a response to the keynote (below), also picked up this motif of 'intertwined threads'.



## Michelle Fava

Tim Ingold's keynote, 'Art and Anthropology for a Sustainable World' posed an interesting challenge. His talk presented a series of dichotomies, then broke each one down. Things became open ended, innumerable, continuing, plural, endlessly unfinished. My drawings did not capture the full wonder his talk aroused in my mind, but it did provide me with cues to recall the feeling. An entire globe being peeled like a tangerine, undulating waves, a mounted

butterfly protesting its transcendence. When I look back at these drawings, I am reassured by Ingold's sentiment that art and science are not separate, and his call for a renewed legitimacy of direct observation as knowledge. At least these were the ideas that came about through my drawing of his talk. Whether this is what he intended I am no longer certain.



Fava also sought for ways to represent the sense of endless unfinishedings that Ingold's talk inspired, annotating drawings with phrases that resonated, and arranging things on the paper so as to provoke futures memories.



Angela Brew



Brew's scribing of the keynote also represented this dense interweaving of connections.

## The scribes reflections

We now turn to the individual scribes, their creations and individual reflections on the experience.

### *Dinsmore-Tuli: drawing the atmosphere*

I remember I was sitting near the back of the relatively empty conference room during this presentation. The man sitting with his legs crossed in the right-hand side of the page was also drawing in a small leather A6 sketchbook, possibly a Moleskine. About halfway through, the bearded man sitting slightly left of centre stood up and gave a presentation; it was on AI generated artwork.

The drawing itself took about an hour, and I mostly used fine black pens. After the conference

I added colour on the chairs with marker, and in the background with coffee and yellow pen. However, I didn't want to work over the drawings too much, to preserve the atmosphere one gets with on-scene observational drawings.

I can only remember snippets of the presentation, as I was more focused on the drawing. I noticed that artists in our scribing group who focused on more conceptual drawing, and taking notes on the talks, more clearly remember the contents of the presentations, while I focused more on observational drawings, and therefore more clearly remember the physical aspects of the talks: the furniture, the features of the speakers, and the architecture of the venue.







**Haroun Hameed: embodied thinking**

Cutting together apart  
Something is being born in an upstairs room,  
wet to your touch and breathing.  
A square grown spherical  
leaks into already-painted skies  
to make room for your whisper:  
'We may be expecting some turbulence.'

Have you seen Vitruvian Man lately?  
It bothers me: he's so damn sectional.  
Like lonely twins, partitioned at birth.  
No man's navel should be that aligned  
with his all-seeing eye, no man's teeth  
that white under his starched upper lip.  
We'd take him for testing,  
but that would only section him further.  
After all, he is the cosmos...  
At least, he bloody thinks he is.  
Maybe he's just waiting for a friend.

That was around the time I lost my aura.  
Woven by hands that knew enough  
for eyes that knew too much,  
people called me Nuisance,  
wanted to unpick me thread by thread.  
Dead to the retina, born in the dance, my colours  
shone above me like a spire;  
the more they scrutinized, the less they saw,  
and it made them mad. I churned,  
whisked myself white in the heat of their rage;  
the more I churned, the less I could deny  
my share of madness.  
That was before husbands took over the  
household chores;  
they, with their dim view of things,  
foresaw clear enough what was brewing.  
'Let weavers weave!' they laughed.  
I craved for rain like children's alabaster feet  
to kick away the dust of that long summer.

I have never seen anything lonelier  
Than Vitruvian Man last semester.  
There is a world out there  
Beyond the shadows of the fair,  
Beyond the goat boy and the  
'It got re-materialized... then it became harder to  
track.'

Inside, the sheets are caked with blood,  
but under glass, our horror can't respire.  
'Remove the sacred hammer from its niche;  
in the event of an emergency, tap, tap, tap.'  
You trickster, light. The statue doesn't budge.  
These days, it's impossible to own anything you  
can touch;  
some instinct of the grain won't answer to the  
clack of scarlet nails.  
Knock again, but softer. Try another colour.  
Whatever breathes in there won't take your name.

Approaching the Art, Materiality and Representation conference through a poetic lens was a challenging, exciting and occasionally frustrating task. My own studies, during which I experienced my share of lecture halls and seminar rooms, developed a sense in me that note-taking ought to be formulaic, utilitarian, and if possible, archly critical. So I felt refreshed and even thrilled by the opportunity to take my seat in the conference rooms with no obligation to master or digest the content being presented. Following a method of the poet John Ashbery, I allowed myself to be as switched on, distracted or bored as my attention saw fit. It was in moments of inattention – as so often seems to be the case with creative practice – that flowerings started to occur.

The notes I took were an exercise in embodied thinking. By staying in the room – just as the artists I was lucky to be working alongside were doing when they spliced together ideas from research papers with observations of the talking, listening bodies that presented them – I gained a lateral perspective on the conference that I would have thought impossible from a purely academic standpoint. This interested me in itself, because it made the oft-lamented alienation of academic discourse from its subject matter an experiential truth for me, something I could witness in myself as an ‘artist’ watching people discuss ‘art’. Normally, I would have listened with a fox’s ears for the cutting argument, the novel implication, or the unacknowledged flaw.

Instead, I became attentive to clothes, faces and hair; the powerful image singing out from a PowerPoint presentation; the atmospheric hush or unexpected cadence; the surge of boredom in the hour before lunch; the eerie quirks of academic language; the emotional undertow of a throwaway phrase or slip; the passionate exhaustion of the underfunded researcher; the nervous apprentice; the boisterous expert. Some linguistic turns began to feel scarily opaque and eccentric – for example, ‘That exactitude released a lot of knowledge.’ Others were surprisingly touching, such as a cross-questioned researcher’s words: ‘For now, I feel alright about it... For now, I’m feeling OK about it... but, that’s only for now.’

The more I listened in this way, the harder it felt. I experienced how the academic discourses were constantly pulling me away – from this room, this body, this life. This is absolutely not intended to dismiss the passionate labour of researchers, whose presentations were often skimming the surface of decades of immersive experience; only to say that such rich experience, when sought directly in the lecture halls, seemed almost too shy, too delicate for their plastic chairs

and timetables. When I came to write the poems, I found that many – not all – of my notes had lost their energy, probably because the underlying experiences had been too confused, various or stale to make deep symbolic imprints. What had remained were people, strong images and stories well-told. It interested me that Tim Ingold, in his keynote speech, along with many other speakers at the conference, was extremely sensitive to this problem. Having worked in deep, lasting ways with artists and communities around the world, they were searching for methods of inquiry that honoured the subtle freshness of the connections they’d made; for a hermeneutics still ‘braided’ into life. Anthropologists wanted a mode of cultural inquiry that didn’t abstract itself from culture, and they seemed to have found this in art, which they nevertheless continued, for the most part, to view analytically: ‘from without’.

Hence the difficulty of assembling the notes I had gathered into a poem that was generous and holistic. I felt as if I was taking leaves that had become disarticulated from the tree, or else lost their special aura somewhere in the cornucopia of ideas, and clumsily wreathing them into something which, though superficially ‘whole’, lacked a symbolic centre of orbit. There didn’t seem to be anything strong enough to worship; or, there were too many idols from which to choose. As a result, the writing became cynical about its subject matter, resenting what gave birth to it – never a good starting point for a poem! I wondered if it might not be better to leave artists to their devices, and social scientists to theirs. As John Ashbery writes in ‘Litany,’ a poem about the relationship between art and academia, ‘You have / No right to take something out of life / And then put it back, knowingly, beside / Its double, from whom / The original tensions unwittingly came.’ Still, I’m hugely grateful for the opportunity to scribe the conference, as it



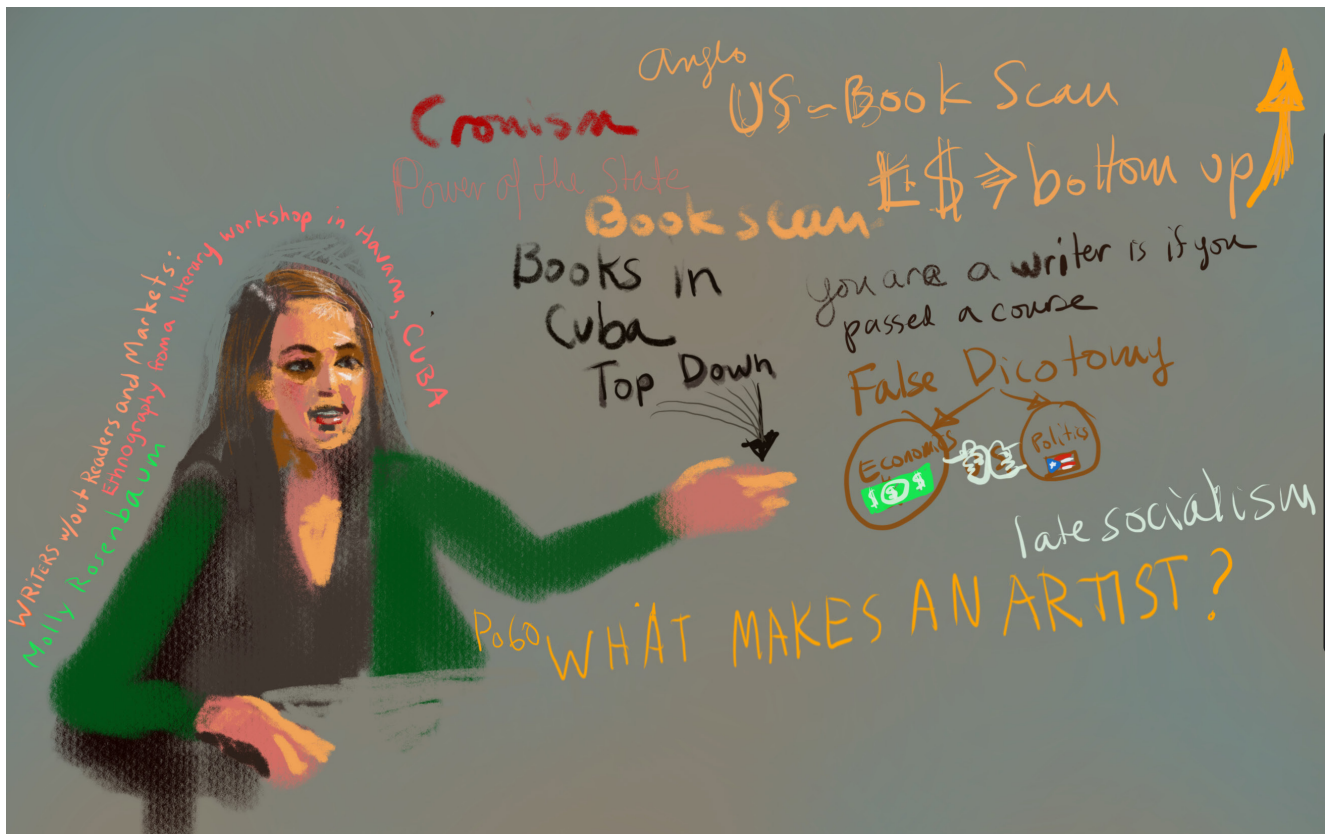
gave me an experiential taste of the limits of both art and academia. Even if their union is a mis-marriage, it feels like a necessary one, if only so we can better understand the 'original tensions,' carving out the limits and possibilities of each

way of seeing. Neither artists nor anthropologists – thankfully – hold the keys to life. Whether we look at it from within or without, the mystery doesn't seem to be going away.'

### Andrea Kantrowitz: drawing as deep listening

The physical experiences that give rise to abstract language are revealed through drawing. Combinations of words and images reflect the multiple dimensions and multimodal character of thought. Drawing while listening forces thought to run on two tracks, performing simultaneous translation/transformation of words back into the images that gave birth to them. It challenges

short term memory. The words that rise to the surface of the drawing become the ideas that are remembered. Looking back at the drawings I remember searching for visual metaphors in the figures of speech, and struggling to get them down while the speaker moved on to new concepts and vistas of thought.



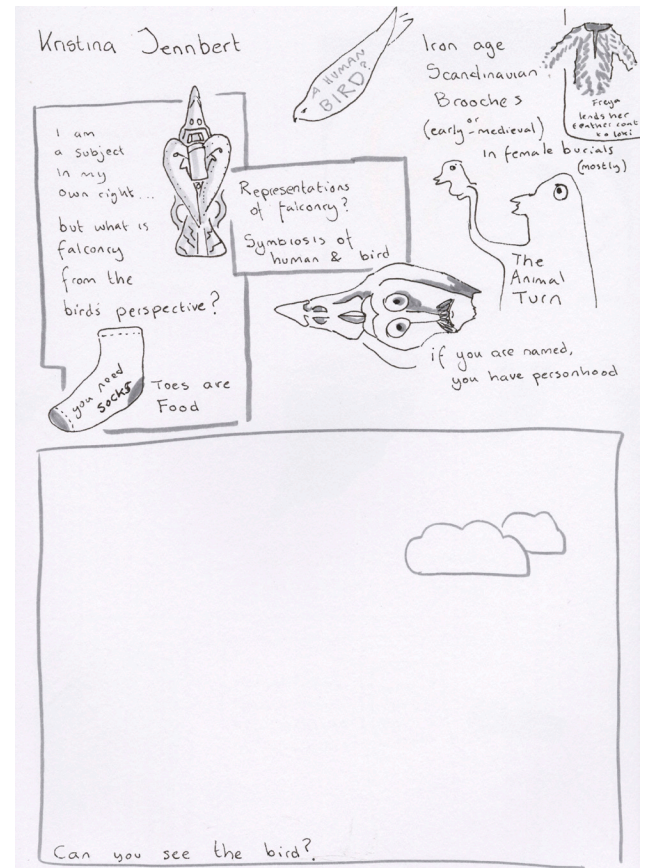
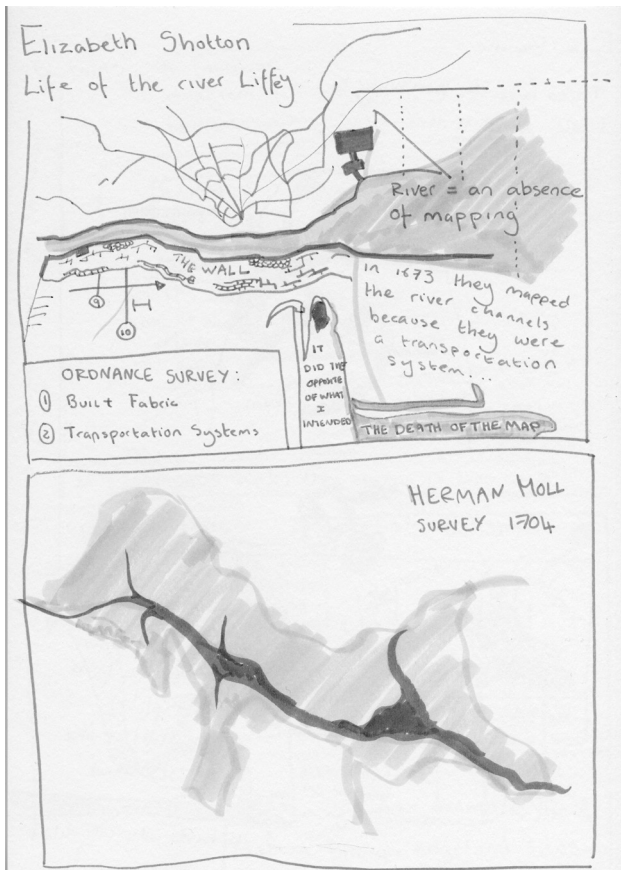




### Michelle Fava: material metaphors

My scribing takes two approaches. One, the easiest, is to simply draw things that are presented as slides. I choose things that strike me, and this allows me to recall and reflect on why they struck me at the time, and why the speaker chose to juxtapose these with other images. In this respect, Gerald McMaster's plenary 'Art, Ethnology and Indigeneity' provided a great deal for me to draw and ruminate over. One fragment of my drawings from his talk stuck in my memory for some time. Although a fairly inconspicuous piece on the second page of my notes, overshadowed by a hanging animal fur and an overtly camp cowboy pastiche, it remains staring from the

corner of the page: 'The Repellant Eye'. A device for frightening birds away, which had been re-appropriated by an artist as a comment on North American colonialism. I'm not sure why it stayed in my mind so persistently, but perhaps it had to do with the way the object was designed. That is, in order to evoke a strong (negative) aesthetic response in birds. Was this also why it evoked a response in me? This image brought into contrast the dual nature of all the imagery we had been shown at the conference. On the one hand, deeply conditioned by generations of culture, and on the other, speaking to something deeper and more fundamental.



Drawing by Fava made during presentations in drawing panel P013 (left) and during Gerald McMaster's plenary, 'Art, Ethnology and Indigeneity' (right).'



The second approach is interpretive. In the absence of images I imagine what the speaker is referring to, and my drawings include more of my own interpretation. It is even harder to make a coherent composition, especially without knowing in advance where the talk is going, how many points the speaker will make, or how far through they are at any point. Some speakers began their talks with cues about how many points they would make and how they related. Others did not. For those I tried to identify overarching metaphors that linked the concepts.

It was an exciting prospect to draw this conference, but it also posed a challenge: how to represent a discourse which is itself about representation? I was naturally drawn to talks about drawing, and at times found myself drawing anthropologists' ideas about artists who draw. It was refreshing to see artists under the gaze of another discipline. I felt a new-found appreciation for well-worn topics. Why do we draw what we draw? Why do we draw at all? I am no closer to answering these questions, but I hope my drawings offer space for reflection on them. I also gravitated to talks that featured animals. Representation of animals has been a long-standing interest for me and I found some compelling ideas here. In the case of ancient artefacts, the question arose: what can we glean about people's reasons for representing animals, from the representations alone? In the case of more recent artworks, how do those works represent and enact our relationship with the natural world?

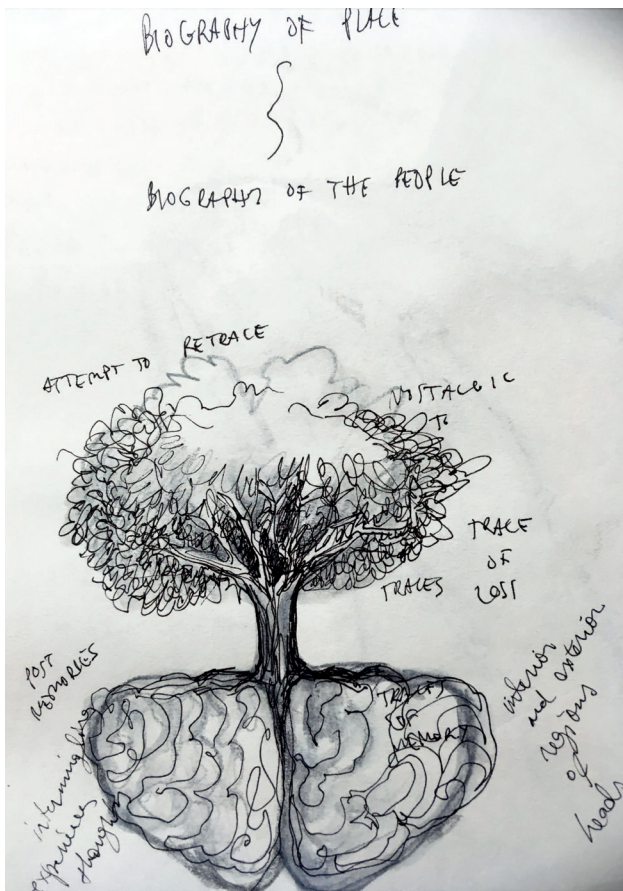
One theme that resurfaced throughout the strands was the distinction between a static representation, and a continuing process that remains fluid and dynamic. As an artist this resonated with me, unfinished work remains vital and challenging, but I soon lose interest in the completed artefact. Of course, as Tim Ingold

so eloquently shared in his keynote speech, there is no such thing as a static object. Even an image perfectly preserved for hundreds of years remains in a state of flux. The image is created by our viewing of it, and its meaning is coloured by the events occurring both before and since its making. We cannot truly see the image the way it was originally conceived, no matter how we might try. To pose this as an argument for the value of creative ways of knowing the world, and their relevance for contemporary sciences, is a welcome message for many artists. For me, the closest approach to Ingold's proposition was to be found in the design anthropology strand. Why not use the tools of ethnography and anthropology, combined with those of art and design, to imagine different futures?

In my drawings I have tried to include the salient points of the talks I attended, and the most striking imagery. In places I have drawn directly from slides, in others I have been liberal in my visual interpretation of the metaphors used by speakers. The ambiguity of these metaphors is presented with sparse text, to invite creative interpretation. The notation is not strictly chronological, it is often synthesized around a central point (sometimes not the one the speaker considered to be central), the chosen elements being those that spoke to my own questions. I have also added details from the audience's comments. In doing this, I have created a subjective, but authentic view of the conference as seen through my eyes.

### ***Emma Fält: travelling on the page***

I present here two drawings that stayed in my mind for very different reasons. For me, drawing is often a listening process that connects different participants in a situation. In this case it is me as a listener receiving and connecting to the speakers' thoughts – not directly, but through the drawing



Drawing by Fält made during the 'Ruin and restoration: pilgrimage sites as traces of conflictual temporalities' by Evgenia Mesaritou (left) and 'Drawing to Remember: Aesthetic Engagement and Drawing as a Way of Weaving Oneself into the Texture of the World' by Kaisa Mäki-Petäjä (right).'

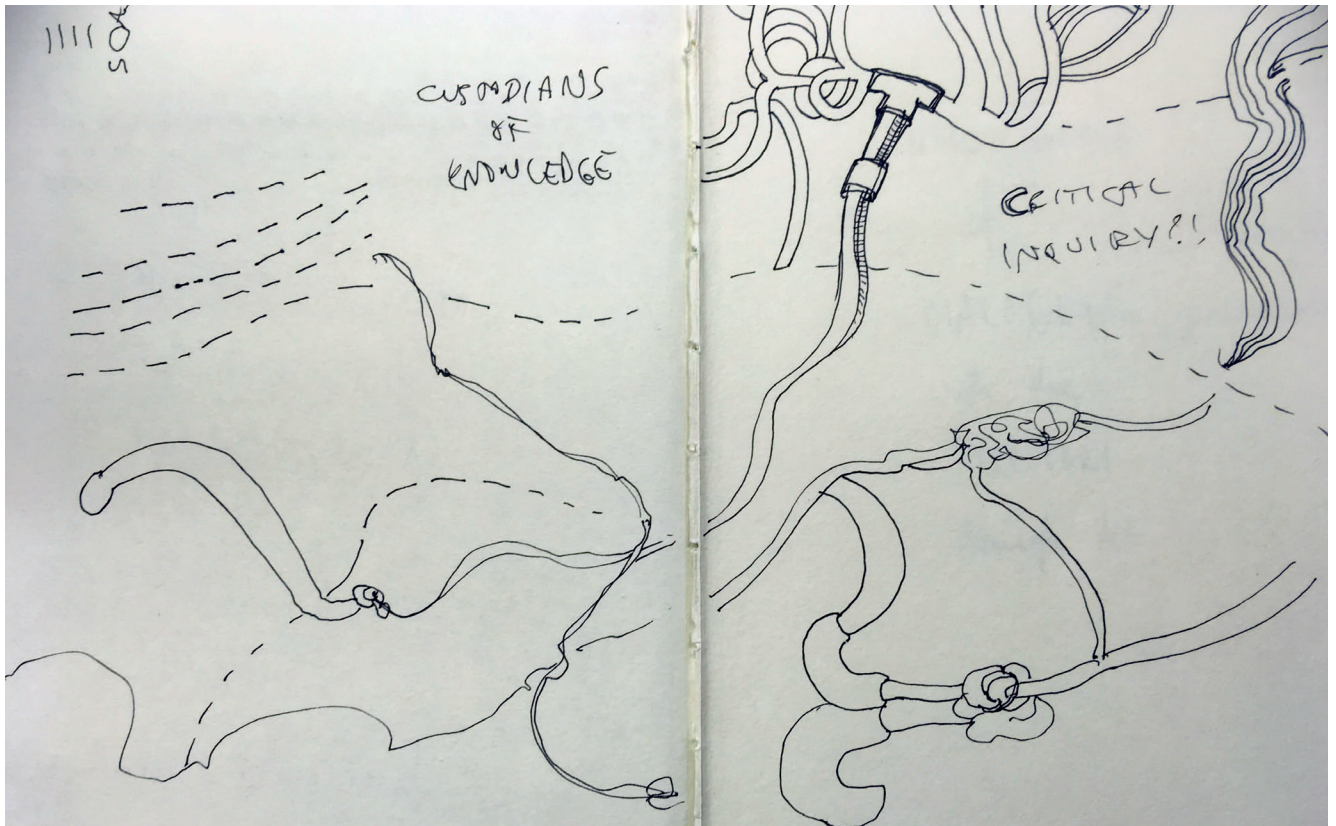
process. During the conference I did not plan or know anything about the topics before I started to make drawn notes. So these drawings are first reflections. Even though I had made some plans for scribing in the RAI conference, I ended up breaking my own rules.

I wanted to concentrate on non-verbal communication, especially space (in speech and speakers' behaviour) and the different ways it affected the lecture and my understanding of the content. As an experiment, I think it was worth doing. There were some lectures where I didn't have any problem on following the 'rules'

I had set, in others I was intuitively illustrating or drawing quite symbolic images, instead of thinking at all about my pre-set task. When I was bored, or just willing to please myself, I drew a lot of figurative images and ended up not listening to the given lecture. When I did concentrate on the task I gave myself, I made more repetitious, abstract drawings that had a lot to do with space, time and connection with the actual topic. I remember much more information about the content of those lectures.

Olive trees, time passing, violence, trauma, physical labour, mind, matter, growth – I now





*Drawing by Fält made during the exhibition opening.*

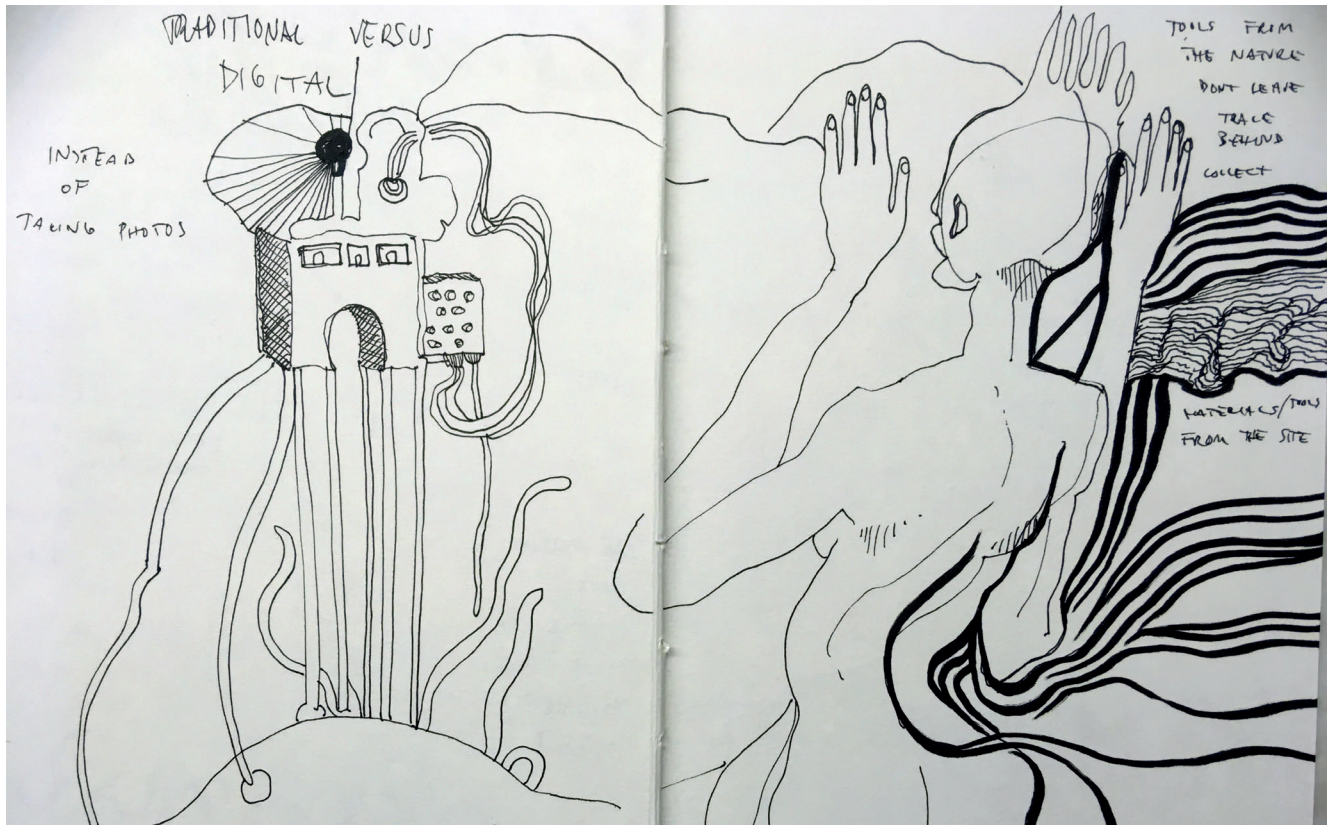
see a somewhat symbolic drawing that makes me want to redraw it from my sketchbook. I remember that my thoughts were about roots of thoughts and places, something that grows for generations. Trees stand at their site for longer than a human life. Trees symbolize immortality, growth and new beginnings, and also knowledge. From the little, fragile seed start enormous processes. When looking at an ancient tree, you can see so many traces of the past. In its body and roots it preserves a lot of data, paths, memories. The past is hidden 'underground', in our bodies, too.

Similarly, places and different animal and plant bodies carry the knowledge and memories of what has been there before. Our body, as a living organism, brain, muscles and organs,

stores data, experiences, and so forth. It grows from what feeds it, doesn't it? I keep thinking, can one even separate the place around and inside one's body?

This is an example of a very intuitive drawing process. I did not think in words when drawing, I did not plan anything. The image came to me and grew on the way. It is typical for me, when I draw to let the first lines rise freely, trying to accept what comes and then continue. Words can be inspiring but somehow it is hard to define what becomes a significant part of the drawing, and why. Some words and memories came to me from the previous lectures, the day before.

I suppose I started drawing from the trunk of the tree. I started with a pencil and continued enforcing the lines and finishing the image



Drawing by Fält made during the drawing panel PO13.

using marker pen. I chose this drawing [for reflection] because the result is not very typical for my current drawing practice. Also, I became interested in comments people made about this particular drawing. When people pay attention to some drawing of mine, I get curious as to why. This could also happen with a drawing that no one notices. But I'd say it's much more usual when I draw a lot. I guess in its simplicity this is a very understandable drawing. You could connect to it in many ways. When I find my own drawing interesting, it usually has more to give than aesthetic pleasure. It means it talks to me and makes me wonder. They may also challenge me to dig deeper into what I am seeing or have actually heard. It could also be that a drawing annoys me, like this one did, because I was

deciding not to illustrate, and then realized that it could be looked at as one.

The topic of the panel was inspiring but I remember being tired and in a not very responsive mood. I am very interested in memory and trauma in general.

The Panel was 'Revealing Histories of Violence: The Representational Politics of Trace'. During my tree-drawing process I was listening to 'Ruination and Restoration: Pilgrimage Sites as Traces of Conflictual Temporalities' by Evgenia (University of Toronto, University of Cyprus). The topic was about a certain area and its history, and the traces our past leaves. Evgenia Mesaritou told of attempts to retrace what has happened, how places store events and how this affects people of the area and the researchers.



The form of the presentation was traditional. In the panel several people were talking about their working processes and showing images, photos of artworks and ruins etc.

Now that I am looking at the drawing I start noticing/remembering the reasons I would like to redraw it. I have a personal interest in this topic, because of friends from that area and my interest in bodies as a kind of place where many memories and traces are stored. Why not a body of a tree or a building? From the point of view of drawing, it is a sketch that serves my further work. So, I am grateful for the person who gave the lecture for inspiring me, even if the content of the lecture is not very detailed in my head anymore. I can hardly remember the place it was about. The olive tree takes me to the Mediterranean area and then, yes, I do remember more and more. By looking at the drawing, I remember more details and notice that there were many things I stored in my memory, by putting what I heard into this small image.

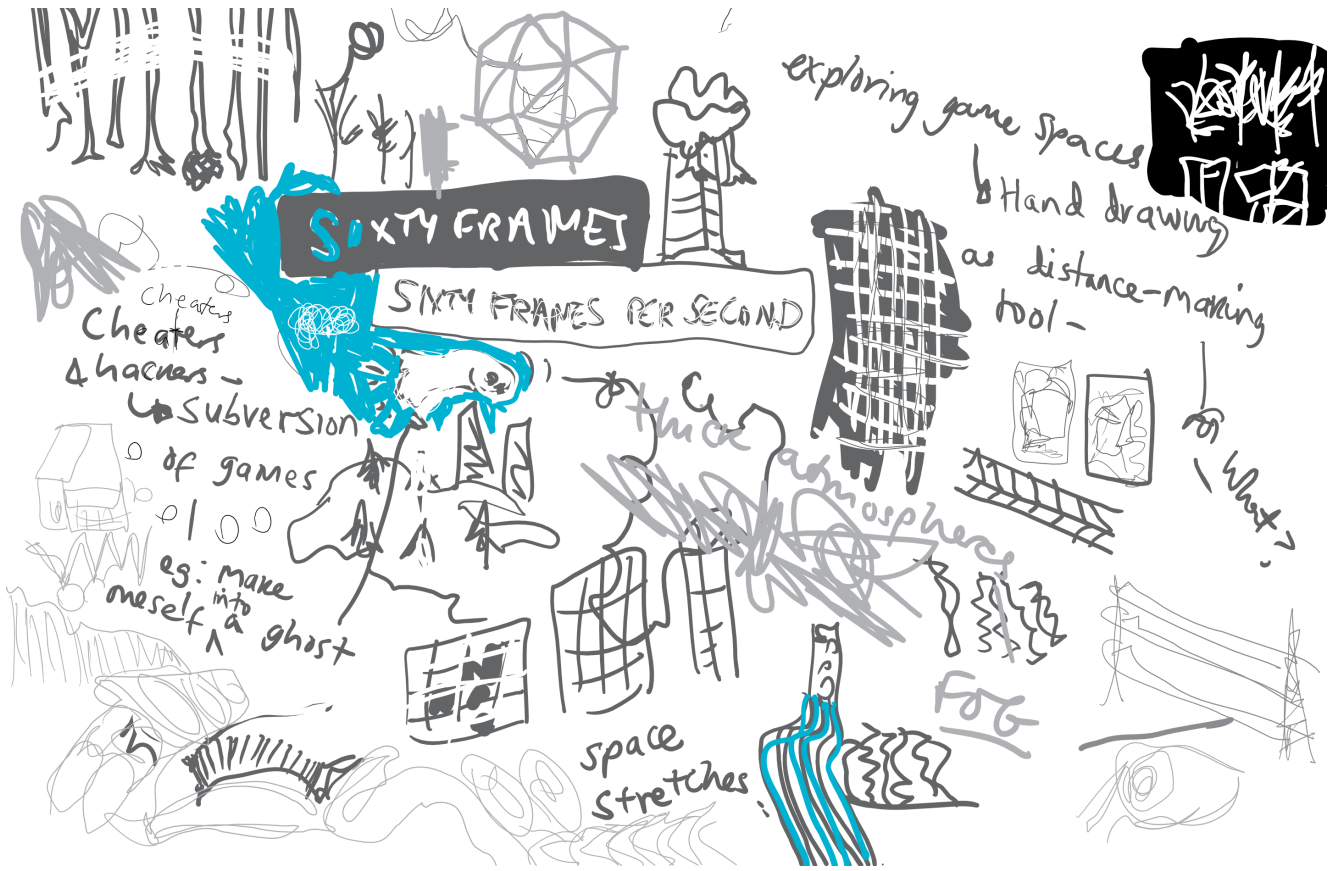
I remember drawing this was peaceful and a concentrated moment. I felt connected to the speaker and her topic. Not trying to illustrate what was being said, just willing to note down the space/time the lecturer was giving to the audience.

This is what I would probably call listening-drawing. What I mean is that as a listener I was drawing in a way that tried to ease the process of concentrating on the information, to let my mind connect with it. The process was partly intuitive, but I also thought about what I wanted to do, to help myself listen. I guess it has much to do with muscle work and movement, connecting rhythmically with what I hear. So, I decided to attend to the kind of space and moment she created when speaking and marked down the rhythms and intensities of the talk. The process was simple. I started travelling on the page, using

only one type of simple, repetitious line. When there was some kind of change in the speech – in rhythm, intensity or when she showed a new image – I changed direction. When I had the notion of space for my thoughts, or of a break, I chose to leave some space on the paper. In some intensive, very enthusiastic moments I drew different lines, more free, curly, messy doodles, that filled and marked down a moment in time. I didn't look at the paper very analytically when drawing, but just let my hand do the same repetitious line or have a break from doing it. That is how I continued the whole time until the very end. Unfortunately, I don't know exactly how much time I spent making the drawing. It was certainly slower than the first drawing, of a tree. Going by my experience, it might have taken 10–20 minutes, the whole presentation. I didn't do any other drawings from the same lecture.

This talk was inspiring, especially the way the speaker was present, which made me energetic, and I was interested in what she said. She was talking with good tempo and there was a lot of information, but it all made sense and she was inviting the listener to her world in a nice way. At first, she gave an example of her own drawing process. I remember her talking about bad drawings and how they actually help in remembering. I found her approach interesting in terms of embodied experiences and connection to environment. I can relate to many things Kaisa Mäki-Petäjä was talking about when describing her drawing processes and her relationship to her sketchbook material. To not succeed is essential in any kind of artistic or research process. It is also triggering to think why we have all those aesthetic expectations and limits. How often do they actually make artistic development harder?

When I return to this drawing I find myself smiling, because for me it looks peaceful and calm. It shows that I accepted the process and



Drawing by Brew made during the presentation 'Sixty frames per second: using the "distancing" quality of hand drawing to interrogate the logic of virtual worlds' by Luke Pearson.

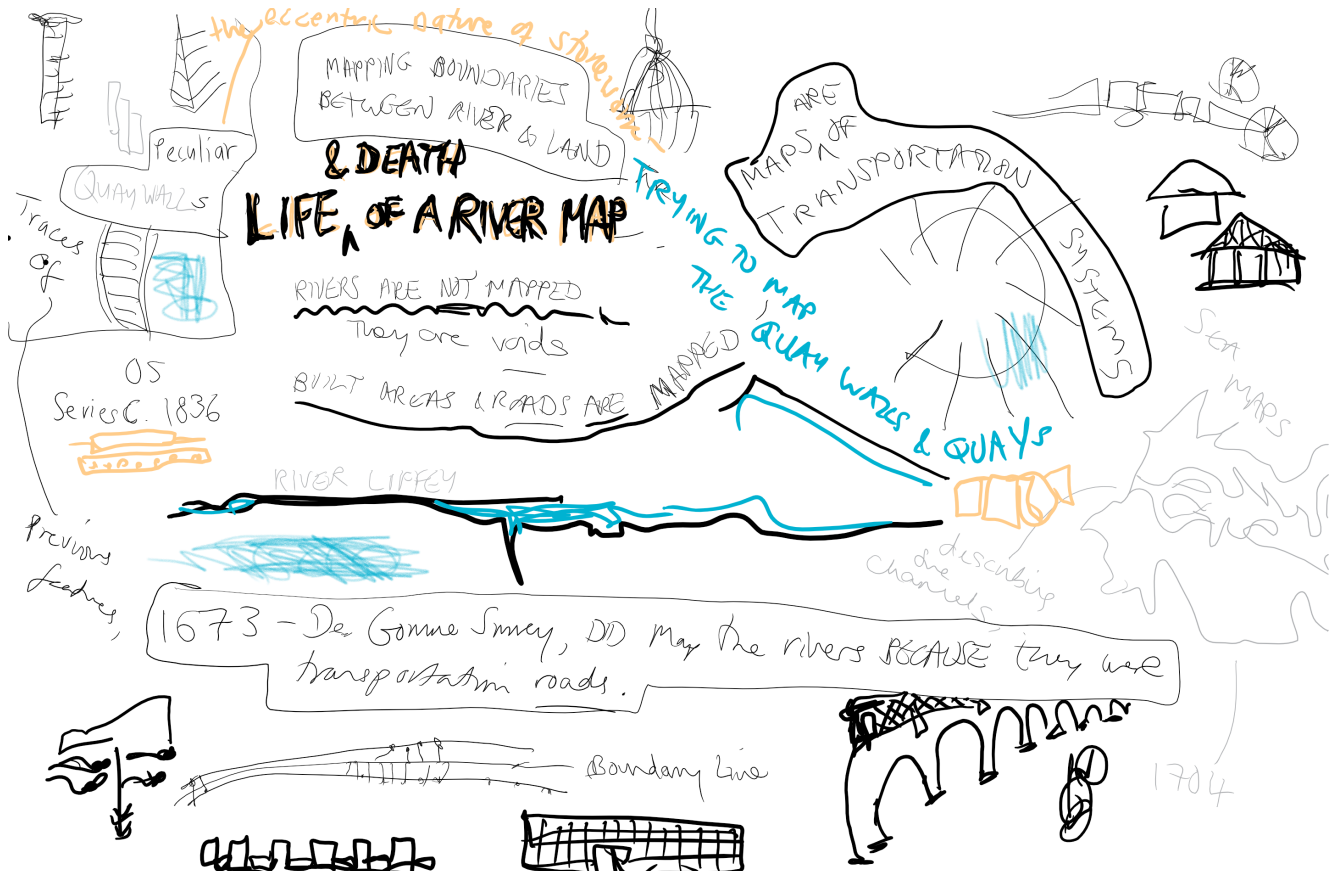
rested in it, instead of trying anything. Also, it simply represents a dialogue with what I heard, because my memory of how the speaker sounded wasn't very calming, but rather energizing. So, it's not so much an illustration as an independent drawing. It could be a map or a portrait, and it helped me to navigate in my own mind.

### Angela Brew: trains of thought and connections

I remember being utterly fascinated by Koutsoumpos's presentation, 'Drawing Sections'. He talked about how architects are taught to draw sections, and consequently come to think in sections. I listened carefully as he explained the

concept of a section, and how this way of drawing came into use. He outlined the importance that the drawings of sections play in the way that various design-oriented disciplines understand and produce space, especially architecture in the digital era. The idea that this ubiquitous way of drawing affects how architects think especially caught my interest, as did the question of when sections are visible, or imagined. I thought of Damien Hirst and his cutting of sections through animals – hence the shark and cow in bottom right of my drawing. And now I look at my drawing I remember liking that children have the same plan view as god! My father was a mathematician – I liked thinking about





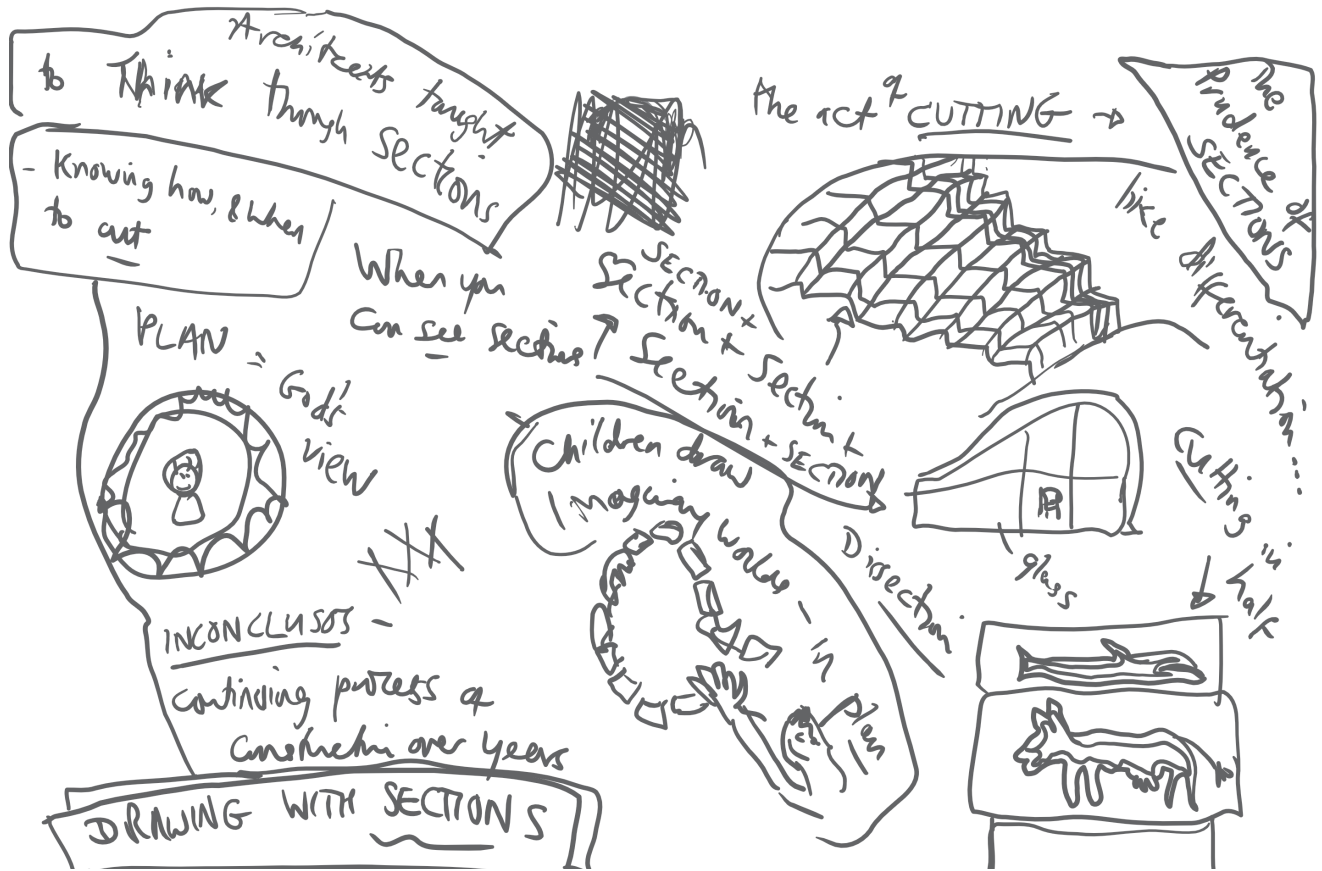
Drawing by Brew made during the presentation 'The life of a river map' by Elizabeth Shotton.

differentiation and how it cuts stuff up into slices to make us able to quantify and manipulate stuff. I was beginning to think about connections with surgery, and this idea of knowing when and how to cut. It resonated with my interest and research about cognitive and perceptual processes of drawing – the decisions and selections we make while drawing, what we focus on and what we edit out.

Koutsoumpas told us that our era has been described as an age of 'divided representation', in which the instrumental, rationalistic and commodifiable aspects of life have overthrown the ethical, creative and communicative ones that used to give meaning to human life. I remember at this point wondering what he was going to say

about the role of sections and how we cut stuff up – including living things.

So, apparently 'this schism has led to the fact that representations have lost their power to represent things meaningfully and have become mere ghosts of reality – often by rejecting it overall' – Koutsoumpas's own words, from his abstract. He hypothesises that understanding space through sections is the outcome of the way that Western culture has been defining knowledge and the way that it has been approaching education. Moreover, he suggests that the drawing of a cross section is a special tool that was invented during the late Middle Ages or early Renaissance in western Europe, and was influenced by humanistic education and



Drawing by Brew made during the presentation 'Drawing sections' by Leonidas Koutsoumpas.

the flourish of human anatomy in the universities of the time.

I was unsure that I fully understood this, but thought I got the gist of the idea, that in some way we are alienated from the present and our bodily reality. Something to do with the body-mind split? Anyway, it intuitively made some sense to me, that a disconnect between our lived experience and our rational thoughts about how things are or should be might lead us to cut things up a lot and try to compartmentalize and categorize stuff.

I feel pretty sure that if I had not been drawing I would have become distracted, for instance by the trees blowing in the wind outside the window (we did have a wonderful view, we were high up,

at the tops of the trees, and they were close to the window). For me, drawing is a way to pay attention, and it often leads to unexpected trains of thought and connections. I do remember a lot about the talk, and looking at my drawing now, a couple of months afterwards, awakens my memories of both the content of his talk and of my drawing process.

All in all, it felt like a very rich experience, as did all the presentations I scribed, and being at the conference as a whole. I attended many sessions of the panel on drawing (PO13). This considered drawing and other inscriptive practices and their relation to creativity and knowledge production, and hence informed what we, the scribes, were doing. I also attended several presentations in



*Stories in the Making exhibit.*

the panel on singing, which were refreshing as they included some performances. Phew, some showing alleviating the torrents of telling we were besieged by.

### **Exhibiting during the conference: Stories in the Making**

The conference's artist-scribers produced material representations of the conference in the moment of attending – so as to listen. In contrast, exhibitors in the Stories in the Making exhibition used a specific physical space within the conference to present material representations to capture the attention of conference participants – so as to speak, or perhaps, to begin conversations with attendees.

Exhibitors were from a mix of disciplinary and interdisciplinary backgrounds. But what they had in common was the exploration and celebration

of making as practice. I (Gemma Aellah) sought to include exhibits showing various points in the process of making, from those displaying pieces their makers considered finished, to more open-ended, unfinished/can-never-be-finished exhibits that invited the audience to participate in making-in-the-moment. For a conference on the theme of art, materiality and representation, I also wanted to find a space that offered a little respite from the feeling of being besieged by 'torrents of telling' (Brew), which I have often associated with attendance as an anthropologist at large-scale academic conferences with multiple panels. The idea was to institute a little more showing than telling.

The most 'finished' pieces in the Stories in the Making exhibition were by artisans like silversmith Irene Orr and master of Japanese maki-e lacquerware Koyanagi Tanekuni. Both





Creations by silversmith Irene Orr.

presented papers during the conference and their inclusion in the exhibition gave attendees the chance to see, in person, the objects they had spoken about making. These were ‘flat’ displays, contained within cases. Occasionally, the artisans were present to discuss their creations, but mostly conference participants viewed them as they would beautiful objects in a museum.

Koyanagi Tanekuni’s oral presentation was about his urgent mission to preserve the traditional craft and intangible cultural heritage of Japanese maki-e through modernizing apprenticeship. He talked about the changes threatening authentic lacquer techniques: the emergence of cheap plastic imitations that have marginalized the consumption of traditional lacquer products, and a shortage of young lacquer artists and craftsmen. It was necessary to enclose his pieces in perspex boxes so as to maintain a level of humidity that would prevent



An example of traditional maki-e lacquer technique by Koyanagi Tanekuni.

cracking, but it also felt apt given the themes of recognizing, valuing and preserving in his talk. We had originally wanted to include his actual tools alongside the objects. These would have had to be displayed in boxes, to make visible and to value the links between the making and the made, but technical constraints meant this wasn’t possible.

Other exhibits were less finished, with conference attendees invited to participate, to varying degrees, in the making of them in the moment.

Christine Douglass, a cross-disciplinary practitioner and independent filmmaker with degrees across science, healthcare, communication and the arts, presented *What If?*, part of an existing multiscreen audio-visual exhibition. Conference attendees could choose what to make of the exhibit, how long to sit and view a film, whether to stay through a loop of a film, or move between films.

Her explanatory board, displayed on the wall of the space that demarcated her exhibition, read:

*Through my filmmaking practice I seek to problematize the idealization perpetuated by many of the clinical, social, cultural and academic discourses that surround representations of*



*Constructing together: Museum of Architecture.*

*illness. My work is also motivated by ethical considerations of how we, as researchers from across disciplines, enter into the lives of those living with existential uncertainty and make their experiences visible.*

The exhibited films were made in collaboration with Terry Burke, JC, Perlita Harris, Frances Hayworth, Zoe Jeavons, Jayne Morris, CT, Sally Light and Naomi Thomas. Presented looped on domestic television sets they form part of *What if?*, a body of work that invites engagement with the challenging, fluid realities of individual experiences of breast cancer.

Recently diagnosed individuals were given broadcast-quality video cameras with the following guidance: you are invited to take this

camera home to film whatever is important to you, whenever you want, for as long as you wish. The collaborative production processes extended through filming, editing and exhibition, and into ownership.

When curating the exhibition, I loved the idea of this. Of people entering when they wished to, sitting and quietly watching, listening and choosing how to engage with the individual stories at their own rhythms. I had envisioned it working as an embodied experience of some of the conference themes emerging in the submitted abstracts around fluidity and unfinisheds. But, in practice, I saw very few conference attendees even enter the space in order to be able to find the emotional experience I had had when engaging with the installation.





*Objects from If I were a Stag by Luciana Lang.*

This is reflected in a comment one artist made about rethinking how to capture attention and bring people into such installations during busy conferences in the future. Here, as a curator, I had failed to account for competing for attention with the coffee, and catching up with friends and emails during conference breaks.

The curators of the *Museum of Architecture* constructed their exhibit space specifically as an extension or culmination of the academic panel they convened, which took place during the first day of the conference (the exhibition itself opening during the conference drinks reception on the first night). This was, arguably, a more successful experiment in capturing attention – at least that of those who had already attended the curators' academic panel and who came together immediately afterwards to construct the exhibit together. Panel participants used the process of exhibit construction to discuss anthropological-architectural engagements, through material

things, artworks and artefacts. Curated by Rachel Harkness, Ester Gisbert Alemany and Camille Sineau, the installation made use of a piece of design by designer Curro Claret, and was envisioned as a platform for sharing research processes and insights, and generating debate on the performative character of architecture-in-practice, its attachment to concrete places, the dwelling experience and the participation of the more-than-human in it.

By contrast, Luciana Lang gave us a representation of a previous experiment in embodied discussions of anthropological concepts by displaying materials created during 'If I were a Stag', an art and anthropology installation conducted in a public park in 2017 and which had aimed at promoting empathy towards the non-human and introducing the theory of perspectivism to park goers.

There were three artists in the exhibition without any specific background in anthropology,



*SAGO by Jason Pierce.*

who used it as a way to talk across disciplinary boundaries or demonstrate their creative processes of storytelling through materials. Andrew Omoding, a professional artist from Action Space, a studio for artists with learning disabilities, gave conference participants an insight to his creative practice through his storytelling and by personal tours around his large-scale fabric exhibits. Andrew shared several pieces derived from a residency with

Craftspace for their Radical Craft: Alternative Ways of Making touring exhibition, including *Table with People Eating*, *Snakes Sleeping*, *Quilted Beds*, *Flag* and *Bedsheet Curtain*. Andrew's work is intuitive and instinctive, using his tacit knowledge of form, shape and constructions to add and discard elements as he works. It involves

storytelling and performance: he weaves, sews, threads, constructs, hammers and screws material together, merging with and becoming part of the work while simultaneously singing and telling a story. His work was shown alongside a film by anthropologist Trevor Marchand entitled *The Art of Andrew Omoding*. Craftspace, a charity creating opportunities to see, make and be curious about exceptional contemporary craft, had commissioned Trevor to acquire a holistic understanding of and insight into Andrew's practice as part of his residency.

Artist Jason Pierson presented *SAGO*, an intermedia artwork reflecting contemporary Papua New Guinea. This work was based on time spent near Kutubu in Papua New Guinea, where industrial-scale oil extraction is causing



the rapid erosion of culture and tradition, and was accompanied by a soundtrack that attendees could download and listen to whilst exploring the exhibition.

### Reflections on holding attention by three Stories in the Making exhibitors

#### *Jo Atherton: attention through chaos*

Joanne Atherton was another artist without a background in anthropology. She was specifically seeking to engage with anthropologists across interdisciplinary boundaries of art/anthropology. Her installation of plastic objects combed from beaches across Britain invited the audience to explore the tideline, and to come to the realization that through the longevity of our material culture, objects will tell our stories in generations to come. Her exhibit allowed for personal discovery,

inviting people to walk amongst the found objects, with the recognition of long-forgotten items causing an emotional response that would perhaps have been impossible to elicit from a traditional academic paper.

*My installation, High Water Mark, was a tideline of plastic objects I had gathered on the UK coastline, collected over a period of about a decade. The organic placement of objects snaked along the floor in apparent disorder replicates the moment at which I encounter flotsam on any beach.*

*The informal and chaotic arrangement served as an invitation to the viewer to walk amongst the colourful and unusual finds, as they tried to puzzle exactly what it was they were exploring. This involvement of the viewer in interacting with the collection of found objects brought them into my creative process; that moment on the sand when a*



*High Water Mark by Jo Atherton.*



*familiar object comes into view and immediately evokes an emotional response, triggering memories long forgotten.*

*The relationship between the viewer and object enabled a journey of personal discovery to take place, as long forgotten items were recognized, in some cases things not seen for decades. The installation became much more than a curious collection of lost items, and transcended into an exploration of the agency of objects, invoking nostalgia and the inevitable sharing of stories, something which I believe lies at the heart of what makes us human.*

*The news abounds with information on the evils of single-use plastic, the threat it poses to wildlife and the legacy it will inevitably leave for generations to come. Notwithstanding this important environmental message, through High Water Mark I want to demonstrate the longevity of plastic, presenting long forgotten trinkets of childhood and common everyday household items, which, to the anthropologist or archaeologist, can reveal much about a culture.*

*In the context of an anthropological conference where research is perhaps most concerned with the relics presented at a distance – either from exotic, far away cultures, or the ancient past – I wanted to demonstrate how the artefacts of our own contemporary culture hold this same agency, and given the enduring legacy of plastic, will inevitably be telling our stories for generations to come. What will become of those personal anecdotes, childhood memories and insights into our lives? How will these individual stories be told in the years to come?*

### **Philip Noble: finding joy in materiality**

String figures have been made, and string games such as cat's-cradle have been played, around the world for thousands of years. String figures were once known to nearly all native inhabitants of East

Asia, Australia, Africa, the Arctic, the Americas and the Pacific Islands. It does not appear that such games have one particular origin; rather, they were developed independently by many cultures around the same time. String is used to play or tell stories, as a form of competitive artistic expression or good luck charms, or simply to kill time. Anthropologists began studying string games at the end of the nineteenth century, and instructions for making over 2,000 traditional patterns have been published since 1888. In the String Stories exhibit string figures were taught to conference attendees, and ones that they remembered from their own childhood were collected.

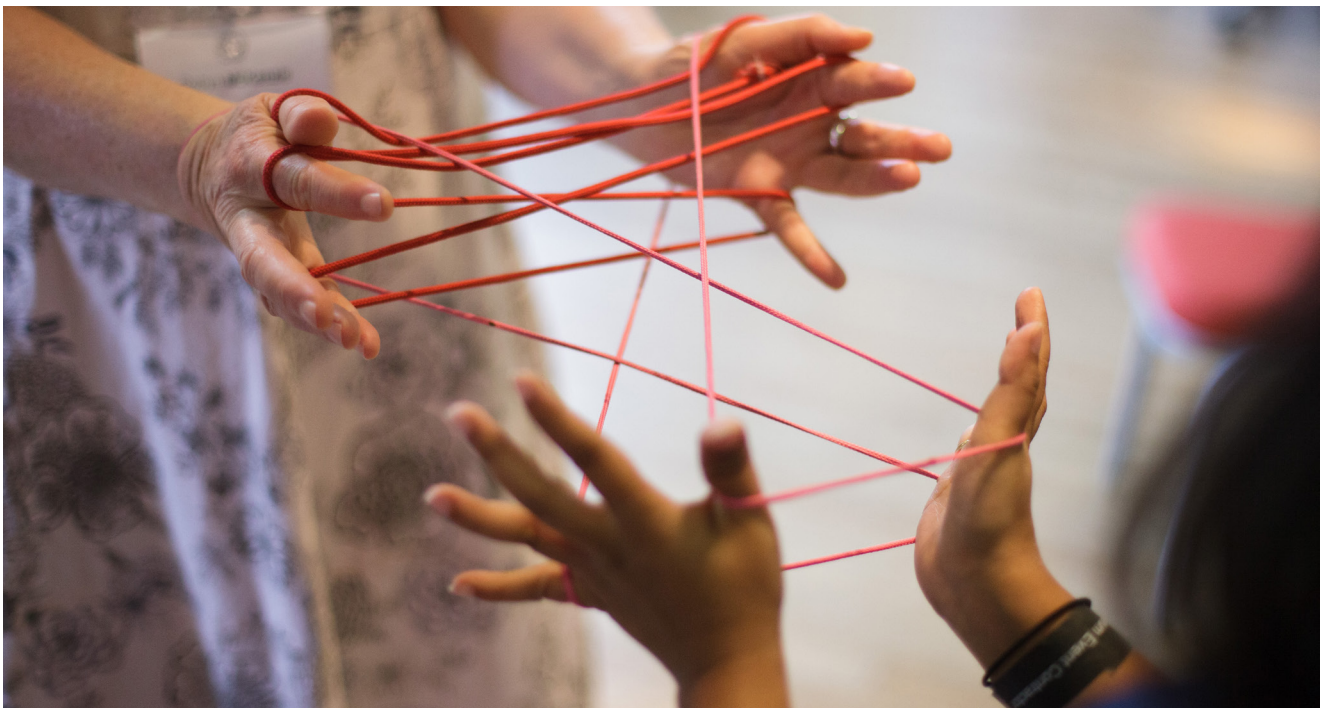
The exhibit was informed by the work of string-figure experts Philip Noble and Robyn Mackenzie, and archival images and text were provided on display panels. But the main intention of the exhibit was to find ways to encourage conference attendees to experience the making of string figures themselves, in a form of haptic discussion. We provided hundreds of loops of string, books about string figures and models of hands with completed string figures and instructions, arranged to encourage conference attendees to try and work out how to make them. Philip Noble and Robyn Mackenzie spent time teaching a group of conference volunteers how to make figures and play string games. During the conference Philip, Robyn and these volunteers used string to grab the attention of passers-by and to 'talk' with conference participants.

The String Stories exhibit was one of the busiest in the exhibition. Philip reflected on the importance of joy to this way of communicating:

*String captures attendance because enthusiasm is infectious, and playfulness is winsome. This is of course not a fresh insight. Kathleen Haddon (daughter of A.C. Haddon) famously said, 'in*



*Instructions for making 'Ten Men'.*



*Robyn making a figure with a conference attendee.*

practice I have found very few people resist the charm of string figures'. Those who make string figures consistently find that, once they have caught the attention of the casual observer, they will be drawn into the whole experience, at least for a short time. Many folk have played cat's-cradle in their childhood, and even though the detailed hand movements have been long forgotten, there is an immediate recollection of those pleasing and fun-filled episodes. For those with a greater knowledge the magnetic draw of string-figure play produces both a light of recognition and a forgetfulness of the usual barriers of social interaction.

Kathleen Haddon, when collecting string figures from those who were very shy and reticent, would sit down on the ground, take out her loop of string and slowly begin forming various patterns. In a very short time a group would have gathered around her, and a sharing of string games and stories would follow very readily. This was much the experience Robyn and I had at the RAI conference in June 2018. The fact that there was a plentiful supply of string loops to give away was most helpful.

Interestingly, but perhaps not surprisingly, those people with string figures of their own to share were most quickly drawn into the experience. Several had good recollections of string play, in particular the cat's-cradle design, and were most willing to learn and share at least for a short time. Others recognized a deeper significance in the non-tangible nature of the figures and the fragility of the whole process. A final word: I have seldom found a string-figure experience which did not draw smiles and laughter or at the very least, produce a twinkle in the eye.

### **Hermione Spriggs: conveying what it is like to be a material object: embodying reversals, tensions and flow**

Hermione Spriggs' *I like Mongolia and Mongolia likes Me* was a piece that also involved loops, but this time the lasso. Her mixed-media installation asked: how might a Mongolian pole lasso facilitate a new style of exchange between art and anthropology? *I like Mongolia and Mongolia likes Me* re-evaluated the performance of an interspecies object, and the role of drawing as an anthropologically relevant method. She also gave a paper at the conference, and here she compares her two different experiences of 'speaking' at the event.

*I Like Mongolia* is an exploration of the world from the perspective of a Mongolian lasso, a tool called the uurga that herding people make and use to rein in wild horses. The lasso is used to capture the attention of a semi-wild horse in a very literal sense – a leather loop attached to the end of a long wooden pole is used to extend the reach of a herdsman prosthetically and to encircle the head of the animal. But attentional capture also takes place in a more performative and gestural way. A rider uses the lasso to communicate with the horse he is riding, using flicks of the pole and directing the horse in a language-like way. The loop of the lasso provides a moving point of focus, a mobile non-Euclidean window into nomadic life. I came to think of it as a drawing tool, both encircling and describing.

As an artist participating in the Land Art Mongolia Biennial in 2013, I wanted to get to grips with this lasso, how it moves and how it works, to negotiate between the perspectives of human and horse. Through my presentation of the work at the RAI I was also trying to capture a human viewer's attention and to manipulate their perspective in an analogous way. I kept asking myself: what is it like to be a lasso?





*I like Mongolia and Mongolia likes Me* by Hermione Spriggs.

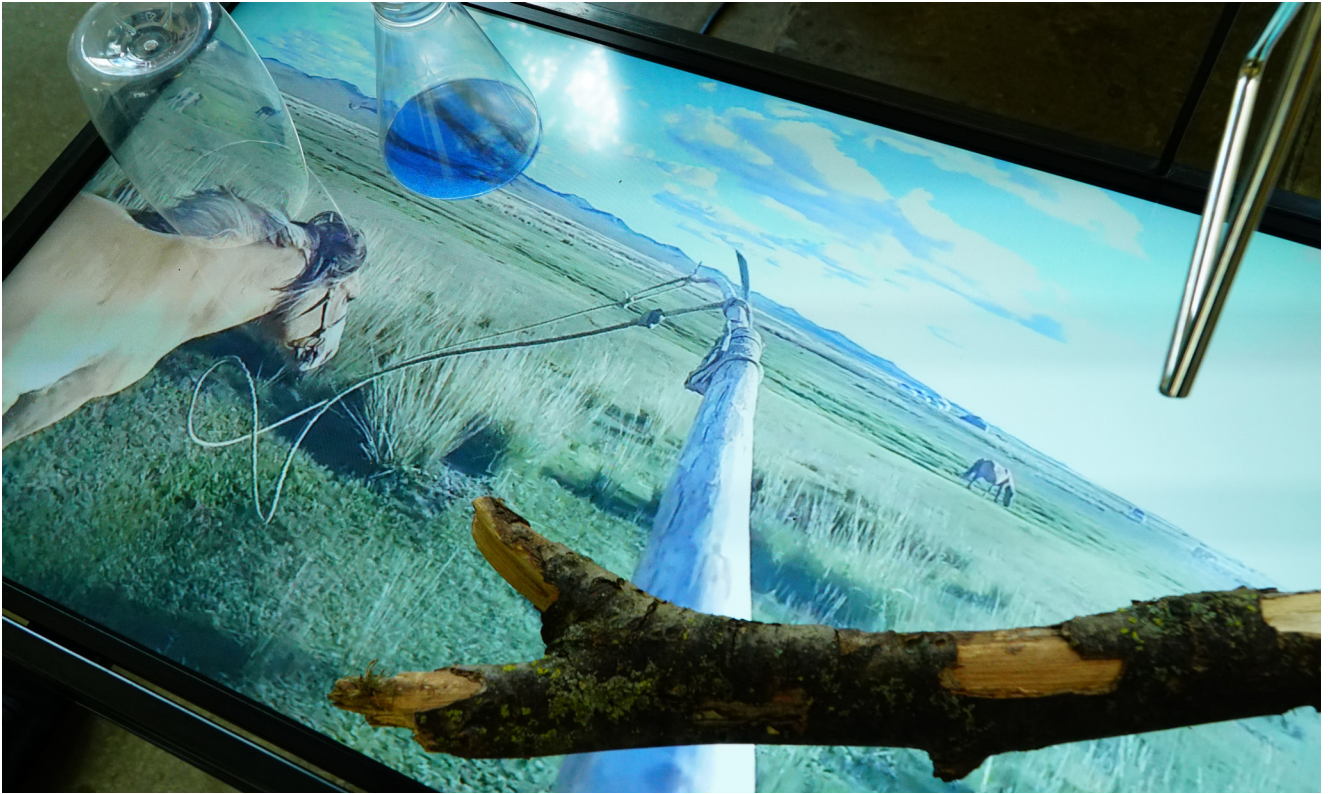
This is the paradoxical question that I wanted the viewer to get tangled up in whilst they engaged with the project. The installation consisted of a video-drawing based on footage that has been captured from the perspectives of a horse and a rider simultaneously, so that when you watch it you shift from one to the other and ultimately adopt a position where you resonate with both these perspectives at once. It puts the viewer in a lasso-like condition, if you like, with an experience of tension, reversals and flow.

So, like the uurga itself, the way I shared this project involved two types of attentional capture. It operated both on the literal level of sensory and perspectival play through the presentation of a video installation in public space. But it also operated on a linguistic register, through the storytelling mode of engaging attention that's

specific to academic presentation. When I talk or write about this work, I try to speak in a way that is also lasso-like – that is, in a playful, figurative way that I hope does some justice to the style of the object itself.

Presenting the project through these two different modes during the RAI conference was very revealing in terms of the kinds of attention that anthropologists bring with them. Attempting to captivate and guide an audience involves working with an existing flow of bodies and relations, not unlike a herd of horses.

Despite the conference's thematic focus on art, materiality and representation, I found it interesting that the attentional landscape of the RAI gathering was focused (as with most conferences) on social relationships between attendees – individuals do not generally arrive



*I like Mongolia and Mongolia likes Me by Hermione Spriggs.*

to these events primed to attend to their material surroundings. With such a large number of mutual acquaintances intensely clustered for a short period of time, this social space didn't provide the ideal conditions for patient engagement with time-based works of art such as my own (the same is true on the opening night of most gallery exhibitions). It felt like capturing attention here would necessarily involve a more deliberate and pointed rupture in the ongoing flow of activity, or a more invested re-architecting of environment, things I'll certainly take into account if the opportunity arises again to share work in a similar situation. Because of this I found the conference panel format (where the attention of a group of people was already 'captured' and contained in a room for a period of time) to be a more receptive space for presenting and sharing

the work. Making use of this format in the style of a performative lecture became a way of working with, rather than against, the dominant flows of attention. This is, after all, the way of the lasso.

### **Conclusions - doing something about it**

We began this paper by arguing that in order to create successful alternatives to conventional ways of anthropological storytelling and discussion at conferences we need to look beyond attendance and think more broadly about attention. We offered this collection of images and reflections in order to give some proper space, and examples, to think about this, both through the artist-scribers attempts to reflect on their own acts of paying attention and the exhibitors' attempts to grab attention of others.

Our challenge here was to show and explore how the artists who attend this specific conference engaged materially with, and in between, the words spoken, hoping to honour and retain the sense of non-linear storytelling, and to find ways to emphasize the artists' ongoing dynamic processes rather than the finished or unfinished art products. We initially considered presenting a series of photographs of the artists' works with no text – to show not tell – but found that this only touched the surface of what was going on, freezing the drawings and showing almost nothing of the life of scribing, making and exhibiting. These processes of experimentation and exploration, of wondering and wandering, needed fleshing out with textual commentary and the artists' own reflections on being at the conference. We feel that the images and textual voices represented here are in a meaningful conversation, dancing around one another to build a 'multi-story'. The drawings tell only some of this story, materially, spiralling around themes, sometimes overwhelming us – where does that thread start, where does it go next, does it ever end? Indeed, if drawing and making were enough, why would humans invent spoken language?

In the case of this team of scribes, the drawings offered a wide range of methods, representing selective modes of attention. It is noticeable that, when presented collectively, the drawings by different artists of the same keynote given by Tim Ingold do seem to speak as one. The effect, to us, is akin to an orchestral piece experienced as a completely contrapuntal sound, very noticeably made up of different individual tunes.

The artists' reflections clearly show that they are all acutely aware of their creative processes, and are able to articulate their methods and purposes verbally. In a manner akin to perception

itself, the scribes actively sought out and selected their foci, knowing, either intuitively or explicitly, that this is the key to learning – choosing what you want to take in, tuning in to it, and out from other stuff. Moreover, they know that 'doing something about it' – with one's body – enhances perception and understanding. Both the reflections of the artist-scribes and the activities of the exhibition artists have given us much to think about here.

Of particular interest was our identification of internal and external approaches, which we broadly characterized as listening and talking, with very specific individualized private acts of cognition or ways of setting themselves up for future remembering, often unreadable to others, and which can be 'played back' via the 'grooves of the record'. We found ourselves using metaphors of perception and music, in line with several of the scribes' explanations of their approaches and bodily ways of attending: drawing to listen, thinking through drawing, tuning in and out.

Dinsmore-Tuli's quiet observational representations of the small unspoken rituals of conference attendance were probably the most readable and effective in taking us back to the experience of the event. His drawings also bring us back down to earth. The artist whose work turned out to be one of the most 'readable' does not remember the content of the talks – notably, in 'real life' Dinsmore-Tuli has an exceptional declarative memory, learning facts and song lyrics extremely fast. For this story, he sacrifices verbal data in order to attend to the visual present. He was not listening to the verbal realm of the conference. Humans have limited attention spans, both longitudinally over time, and vertically in one instant, therefore knowing where to focus attention appropriately is a crucial life skill, and the key to expertise in all fields.



His drawings also resonated with us because they took us beyond this specific conference to the many others we had attended. They are closely observed and specific. Yet, for us at least, they are representations of an archetypal conference. Here, what art has made visible is the impossibility of paying attention across such expansive experiences (the ‘torrent of telling’ that Brew describes), experiences which are sometimes exhilarating, sometimes exhausting, sometimes boring. This also applies more broadly to thinking about how to situate exhibitions within the conventional structures of large-scale multi-panelled anthropology conferences, especially those not explicitly on the theme of art itself; and to finding ways to make the most of multi-storied experiences when, as Hermione Spriggs has pointed out, attendees ‘do not generally arrive to these events primed to attend to their material surroundings’. The exhibition captured more attention than the scribes, with installations, teaching of string figures, and found or made object being catalysts for conversation. But it also felt like somewhere people passed through on the way to somewhere else, rather than being giving equal weight to the panels, keynotes and plenaries. This could, perhaps, be easily changed.

### **Future experiments**

For us, making this paper together has, itself, been an act of attention and remembering. Taking the time to look slowly and closely at drawings, poems, images of the exhibition and artists’ reflections has been a dynamic and iterative process of ordering and reordering. We kept on noticing things not at first apparent, making unexpected connections and deepening our insight. From our positions, as art curator and scribing leader, and co-writers of this paper, we feel that while the making and scribing definitely added a lateral dimension, it

remained a sideshow, having little impact on the conference. We strongly feel that these ‘making’ and ‘doing something about it’ modes could be more deeply integrated. We hope that panel members will follow the lead of the ‘Museum of Architecture’ curators and create participatory collaborative artwork during conferences, as material and performative ways of sharing research processes, insights and generating debate. This could encourage direct dialogue between more traditional panel presentations and exhibitions. We also recommend holding panels and/or performances within exhibition spaces, to bring them into dialogue with keynotes and plenaries. Along similar lines, participants could be encouraged to join with the official artists and scribes to engage with all the anthropological talk in these embodied and active ways. After all, in some way or other, we all take notes. Knowing the power of making to transform perception and unlock new ways of seeing, we think it would be well worth trying to embed these approaches into future RAI events, for example by encouraging people to share their own personal scribing during the conference and asking them to ‘report’ regularly to an evolving art wall – a living exhibition – sharing sightings, suspicions, musings, recordings. That way we turn private acts of scribing into public conversations, enabling us to listen and talk all together, grounding discussions in material and embodied forms, together making sense of the turbulence by creating a literal dynamic network of external physical mind and memory, as well as a document for later remembering.

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# Anthropology & Art

A new open-access publication series edited by the RAI Anthropology of Art Committee. The series stems from the international conference Art, Materiality and Representation organized by the RAI in collaboration with the British Museum and the School of Oriental and African Studies in 2018. Its aims are to make available to a wide audience works that engage with the connections between visual, material, aural and other expressive human practices and the lived worlds in which they take place from an anthropologically informed perspective.

We solicit new contributions from anthropologists and others – such as archaeologists, art historians and practitioners – that will enhance and expand our collective understanding and appreciation of this important area of social life.

## Guidelines for submission:

Texts should be of maximum 8,000 words (including endnotes and references). We welcome original works that explore the meaningfulness of images, artefacts, sounds and performances and engage with anthropological approaches and/or analysis. There are no restrictions regarding the emphasis on the visual and textual aspects of the contributions and authors are welcome to discuss their proposed submission with the editor ([paolo.fortis@durham.ac.uk](mailto:paolo.fortis@durham.ac.uk)).

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